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Chester A. Bitterman 3d
Murdered in Colombia

Bitterman killer held, general says

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia — The Colombian army reportedly has arrested the guerrilla who killed Chester A. Bitterman 3d, an American Bible translator who was accused by insurgents of being a CIA spy.

The newspaper El Tiempo quoted the Colombian army chief, Gen. Forero Diaz, as saying yesterday that a member of the M-19 guerrilla group whom he identified as Hugo Oswaldo Chavez had been arrested.

Bitterman, 28, a native of Pa., was kidnapped on Jan. 19, 1981, by M-19 guerrillas from a Bogota residence maintained by the Summer Linguistics Institute. The purpose of the private institute, which has its main facilities in Texas and California, is to translate the Bible for primitive Indian tribes.

The kidnappers apparently had intended to seize the institute's director, according to others who were in the house at the time. But because the director was absent, they said, the men seemed to focus on Bitterman simply because he spoke Spanish more fluently than any of the others.

During the weeks of Bitterman's captivity, the guerrillas repeatedly charged that the institute was a front for CIA activities and demanded that its members leave the country. Institute officials refused, and on March 7 Bitterman's body was found in a bus in Bogota. He had been shot.

El Tiempo reported Gen. Diaz as saying that Chavez was one of 17 M-19 guerrillas arrested in an army sweep this week. He said those arrested included several members of M-19's high command.

M-19, which has threatened to disrupt congressional elections next Sunday, stole a ton of explosives Monday from a cement factory in the western city of Cali, the army said in a communique. It said it had uncovered an elaborate plan by the guerrillas to sabotage the elections.

The Colombian government alleges that M-19 is linked to Cuba. The government suspended diplomatic relations with Cuba last year, claiming that Cuba had trained and given weapons to M-19 guerrillas.